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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: ITALY SENDING POSITIVE MESSAGES ON ELECTIONS

REF: A. STATE 12757

[1](#)B. STATE 12610

Classified By: Pol M/C Tom Countryman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Despite the recent death of another Italian soldier in Iraq, Italy has no intention of withdrawing its troops until asked by the new Iraqi government. Furthermore, Italian officials continue publicly to support the January 30 elections as the first step in the transition to a free and democratic Iraq. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff conveyed reftel demarches to MFA Iraq Task Force officer Damiano Francovich on January 24. In terms of substance, Francovich said Italy is fully on board with our points and has continually made positive statements about the upcoming elections; indeed, the MFA spokesperson held a press conference a week earlier in which he made very similar statements on behalf of the Italian government. On process, however, Francovich noted two concerns. First, he said, due to the proximity of the elections it would be difficult to get other EU members to issue similar statements prior to the elections. Secondly, he questioned whether the request should be made to other coalition members, specifically Poland. Poloff responded that our hope was that all EU member states would issue statements supporting the upcoming elections and that it was Italy's decision which ones to approach. On timing, Poloff noted that if statements are not possible before January 30, declarations of support for the new Iraqi government following the elections would also be helpful, to which Francovich noted that, depending on the outcome, the tone of the message may need to be adjusted. Iraq Task Force Director Luigi Maccotta called Pol MC January 25 to confirm that the MFA would seek to issue instructions for joint US/Italy/UK demarches to its posts in EU capitals.

[1](#)3. (U) Italian public officials have been actively supporting the upcoming elections. FM Fini, on the second leg of a trip to countries struck by the December tsunami, was reported January 22 as saying that, "If the elections are not held, terrorism will win...the elections are a point of departure for the plan to restore Iraq to the Iraqis." DefMin Martino (who will meet with DefSec Rumsfeld in Washington on January 28) told a joint session of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies on January 20 that postponing the elections would hand a victory to insurgents who have stepped up violence in a bid to prevent them from taking place. "Sticking to the schedule date," he said, "would confirm realistic expectations that the transition period will lead to a democratic future."

[1](#)4. (C) Poloff also took the opportunity to express USG condolences on the death of Simone Cola, the Italian officer killed in a January 21 attack on an Italian army helicopter in Nassiriyah, bringing to 20 the number of Italian military personnel killed in Iraq. Francovich opined that while the death would revive public opposition to the Italian presence in Iraq, it would not have any substantive effect on Italy's commitment to staying the course. FM Fini himself confirmed this sentiment from Bangkok, saying that, "Italy's stance cannot change with the death of chief petty officer Cola...we will remain (in Iraq) until the Iraqis ask us to leave...Italy will get out only when the legitimate Iraqi government asks us to."

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